CHAPTER II STRUGGLE FOR THE AFFIRMATION OF SELF

- Adventures of Augie March
- Henderson The Rain King
The present novel *Adventures of Augie March* (1953) marks an important shift from the earlier 'victim-heroes' obsessed by their isolation and sufferings to the one who is more extrovert, more cheerful and more friendly with the people around him. Augie March - the protagonist of the novel moves a step forward from the state of the absurd man to that of being a 'rebel' through his consistent struggle to achieve and maintain his unique human identity by refusing to submit his will before the various social and materialistic temptations and impositions. Augie, pursuing the line of the rebel hero, does not in the process give up his freedom to become his own self - the ideal human being which he envisions for himself and which is reflected in his dream of being the founder of a foster home for orphans.

Bellow's absurd vision of life gets exemplified in Augie's attempts to have a 'feel' of humanity by developing close links with all sorts of people around him - rich as well as poor, quite influential as well as quite humble ones; even with thieves and criminals, more to have a glimpse of that world rather than out of any real inclination for it. The real appeal of Augie lies in accepting people 'as they are' without feeling any need for their transformation into something he could bear. Unlike his elder brother - Simon, he had no 'grudge-bearing power'
and as Clem Tambow, one of his friends points out, anything could make him laugh. At the tender age of twelve, he is out in the world 'to get a taste of life and the rudiments of earning'. The forces of imposition and manipulation evident in the novel in the form of various 'machiavellian' characters pose a great hinderance in his endeavour to explore and pursue his individual identity and role in the world. Almost all the persons he comes in contact with want to exercise their authority over him and want to mould his destiny according to their own plans and ambitions; though Augie himself shares certain traits of those around him, and that is why he is easily exploited by them. Augie's main conflict, as a matter of fact, seems to be with his own uncertain and confused self. He is obsessed with the idea of an independent and 'worthwhile' fate but at the same time yearns for love too which he regards as fundamentally imprisoning. But eventually he realises that it is by giving an account of his own self that the true meaning of the self can be explored and the 'axial lines' of his life comprehended.

The novel, as the title suggests, narrates the account of the protagonist's life and his adventures but Bellow also describes at length the various external influences which play a significant role in the formation and development of Augie's character. Augie, right from his early childhood comes into close contact with a large number of 'big' characters who are dehumanized and devalued under the influence of industrial capitalism. Devoid of
all human sensibility, money matters the most to them with which they would try to manipulate, threaten and exploit other human beings. Grandma Lausch - the eccentric old Russian Jew and the widow of a powerful businessman, is the first such "machiavellis of small street and neighbourhood that my (Augie’s) young years were full of." She is not in Augie’s relation but comes to their house as a 'boarder' and gradually comes to establish her authority as a 'queen-mother' to regulate the domestic affairs of the Marches: "For so many years", says Augie, "She was used to direct a house, to command, to govern, to manage, scheme, devise, and intrigue in all her languages." While considering it her duty to 'wise up' the family, she teaches Augie and others the value of expedient lying so that at the age of nine years only, Augie, coached by Grandma Lausch, can appreciate the art of lying perfectly. So overpowering is her influence that at the age of twelve itself, she boasts of having already 'formed' Augie by sending him to Anna Coblin, Augie’s mother’s cousin, in a bid to make him learn 'culture and refinement'. Grandma’s 'empire' however, soon begins to crack down as Augie and Simon get mature and learn more about the world. Finally, she herself, unhappy with the family’s lack of talent, leaves the house to spend rest of her life in the charity Home for the aged and the infirm.


2. Ibid., p.9.
Cousin Anna Coblin, where Augie is made to stay for a certain period on Grandma's insistence, considers it her duty to direct him to the 'great eternal things' through certain 'religious instructions' and one could discern the influence of these 'instructions' on Augie's later life.

William Einhorn is another Machiavellian influence and the 'first superior man' Augie comes in contact with. He has intelligence, real directing power and philosophical capacity and inspite of being crippled, remains in constant touch with all that happens around him. Augie is highly impressed by his enormous amount of confidence in fitting the whole world into his scheme. According to Augie "Einhorn had a teaching turn similar to Grandma Lausch's, both believing they could show what could be done with the world, where it gave or resisted, where you could be confident and run or where you could only feel your way and were forced to blunder."¹ It is at Einhorn's house that Augie comes to learn the 'lessons' and 'theories' of power.

After high school graduation, Augie leaves Einhorn's place to work in a saddle shop owned by Mr. Renling - an Evanstonian sporting goods man. Impressed by Augie's effective handling of his job, Renlings soon begin to develop a different attitude towards him. Mrs. Renling, in a hope to 'own' him, teaches him to handle

¹. Ibid., p.80
himself socially and makes frantic efforts to 'refine' and 'school' him. Augie is supposed to become Augie Renling, live with them and inherit all their money.

Then there is Augie's elder brother, Simon, who, out of his sense of duty towards Augie, wants him to join the world of business so as to earn more and more money. After his engagement with Charlotte Magnus, quite a rich woman with large fortunes, Simon wants Augie also to adapt himself to Magnus' family's style and marry Charlotte's cousin - Lucy Magnus. He also makes Augie his partner in the coal business. But Augie is not meant for this world full of conceit and duplicity and soon proves to be a failure both in business and in his love with Lucy Magnus, causing much disappointment to Simon who with his successful manipulations, soon comes to lead a 'princely' life.

Thus, the various 'destiny moulders' use different methods of manipulation to impose their own versions of life and reality upon Augie. They all threaten imprisonment of Augie's individual self through instruction, advice, adoption, violence or emotional black-mailing in the name of family relationship. Augie, in his own peculiar way, tries to reject these influences, frequently drifting in and out of them, wandering from one job to another and shifting to various places in an effort to preserve his own self from their corrupt influences. But on closer examination we find that Augie displays an
ambivalent attitude towards all these major influences; on one hand he disapproves their selfishness, greed for money and their autocracy while on the other, he seems to be enamoured of their particular traits and defends them. His ambivalent attitude towards Grandma sets the pattern for all his subsequent relationships. She was 'tyrannical and a snob' yet, claims Augie, the old lady 'had a heart'. "Similarly Einhorn was a dangerous man selfish, jealous, autocratic, carp-mouth and hypocritical", yet, Augie, in the end, always had 'high regard for him'. He was quite angry with his brother Simon on so many occasions but the instance he saw him, he loved him again. He just couldn't help being 'brotherly' with him.

This ambiguity in Augie's personality, along with his depravity in the childhood (Augie being the byproduct of a travelling man and living in slum areas) explains his attraction to not only influential people but towards the criminal world as well. Though not criminal in the real sense, one finds Augie being repeatedly drawn to petty crimes - a mode of life he is morally in conflict with. As a matter of fact, his longest childhood friendship is with Stashu Kopecs, a thief and Augie too steals with him, though mostly for the satisfaction of dexterity. He again steals money in the company of Jimmy Klein, is caught up and severely punished. He decides to give up robbery after plundering a leather goods shop in the company of a car thief, Joe Gorman but tired of his poor life in Chicago city and in dire need of money, once again joins Gorman in
the illegal work of running immigrants over the border from Canada over to New York. After a narrow escape from the police right on the first day, he once more decides to call it a day but his meeting with Padilla, his schooltime friend, this time incites him to experience with book stealing just to give himself a start at something better.

Augie's subjection to criminal and illegal acts is thus closely linked with his poor conditions of living. More often than not, he indulges in stealing when he is in urgent need of money to improve upon the conditions of his life. His apparent 'sense of freedom' partly accounts for his attraction to these acts. However, for the greater part of the novel, Augie is quite uneasy and confused about his recurrent links with the dubious characters. Until his vision of the 'axial lines' when things get somewhat clear to him, he 'circles' wildly between two sets of characters - wealthy and influential people on one hand and deprived and criminal ones on the other - neither wholly adopting their ways nor rejecting the 'philosophies' that they stand for.

Augie, as a matter of fact, remains in a constant state of dilemma over the true nature of his own character and the role of external influences in shaping his destiny. He apparently seems to suffer from lack of an independent initiative and singleness of purpose. It is always other people who take decisions for him and when they call him to join their plan, he willingly does so. We find that all
the jobs are got to him through other persons—be it through his brother, his friends, his acquaintances or his beloveds. Further, no sooner is he offered a new job or a new prospect, he leaves the earlier one to join it and this pattern of 'going in' and 'coming out' continues throughout the novel. While others at his age, including his brother Simon, who isn't much senior to him have understood the hard realities of life and subsequently chosen their directions, Augie till the end, is not clear about what he really wants: "I know I longed very much," says Augie, "but I didn't understand for what?"

For this lack of clarity of purpose, Augie apparently seems to fall into the trap of anyone who wishes to control and direct him, but we find that when the need does arise, he firmly asserts his 'opposition' and independence too. He no doubt gets himself involved in all kinds of adventures, good or bad—be it deceit, theft, love or sacrifice—but after a certain period, always comes back to his own self though often at the last minute, before being finally destroyed by them. It is this firm and continual 'no' to various persons and their maneuvers and his refusal to be inactivated or demoralised by his sufferings and failures that establish him as a rebel in the Camusian sense of the term. He refuses to submit to every such adaptation which seems to threaten his quest for an independent fate. Einhorn suddenly discovers this

1. Ibid., p.99
quality in Augie while advising the latter to keep away from the Company of thieves: "But wait. All of a sudden I catch on to something about you. You've got opposition in you. You don't slide through everything. You just make it look so." Augie is too excited to hear this from Einhorn. It is for the first time that he has heard the truth about himself from anyone: "I did have opposition in me", he affirms, "and great desire to offer resistance and to say 'No!' which was as clear as could be, as definite a feeling as a pang of hunger."\(^1\)

As Camus' rebel slave's 'no' to his master implies his categorical refusal to submit to the conditions he considers intolerable, to say 'no' is Augie's principal way of asserting his individuality. Unlike Simon who is unable to resist himself from falling into the temptations of commercial world, Augie does not get truly involved in any action or scheme that does not really excite him or bind him in a strong emotional bond. Though he would passively accept the scheme and work in it for a time being but sooner or later, would break away from it and that too, not because of any selfish motives but due to his innate desire for freedom and individuality. His refusal to submit to various worldly schemes and manipulations is his mode of strategy to extricate his self from these social contracts and bindings, which is essential for his existence and which constitutes the main strength of his moral stance.

\(^1\) Ibid., p.137
Bellow intends to project Augie as a singularly 'adaptable' character. There is something in him which makes people 'adaptive' towards him. Almost everyone he comes into contact with wishes to 'own' him some way or the other. In the very beginning, he had in a way been an 'adoptee' to Grandma. Then cousin Ana wishes to marry her daughter Friedl to Augie. William Einhorn, though not 'fatherly' yet had his eyes on him and then there is Mrs. Renling who is 'specially adoption-minded'. As a matter of fact, adoption by Renlings would have proved quite a lucky break for Augie. He would have got sufficient money as well as love of a 'real family' which hitherto was denied to him. Yet Augie refuses the offer as he had done on earlier occasions. What Augie fears most by such attempts is his destruction of the self by the contemporary world and its realities. His main aim is to resist total manipulation and authority of various characters in an attempt to assert his self in the light of his own values rather than being assisted by the existing facts of life-situations around him. In a world where it is extremely difficult to distinguish real from the false, where 'external life being so mighty (and) the instruments (of destruction) so huge', it is undoubtedly a challenging task to maintain one's individuality; nevertheless Augie intends to do that and makes honest attempts for it too, which is Bellow's own view of the metaphysical rebellion in relation to asserting the value of the self and individuality.
Unwavered by a dreadful view of the world where a man has been reduced to a 'mere particle,' Augie insists on his quest for a 'worthwhile' fate. (Nevertheless I stand by my idea of a fate). Hence in search of a good fate, he leaves one thing after another; moves in and out of love, friendships, jobs and various organisations since they all threaten confinement for him. Early in the novel, when aunt Coblin has already made a plan for Augie to marry her daughter Friedl some day, Augie rejects the proposal for want of a 'better fate': "Even at that time, I couldn't imagine that I would marry into the Coblin family ... My mind was already dwelling on a good enough fate."¹ (emphasis added) This longing for a 'good enough fate' is repeatedly conveyed by Joseph whenever he meets a new person or joins a new job. He leaves the Renlings for the same reason:

"Just when Mrs. Renling's construction around me was nearly complete I shoved off. The leading and precipitating reason was that she proposed to adopt me ... Why should I turn into one of those people who didn't know who they themselves were? And the unvarnished truth is that it wasn't a fate good enough for me...."² (emphasis added)

He refuses to fall into his brother Simon's plans for him to gain wealth and power by somehow managing to marry Lucy Magnus, be it through love or deceit. But Augie would not let himself fall in such low gimmicks even if that mounts to loss of luxury and power for him. Augie's freedom to be

1. Ibid., p.36
2. Ibid., p.177
his own self and his desire for a 'worthwhile' fate is closely linked with his idea of love. For want of sufficient clarity and concreteness, his love first for Thea and later with Stella, deprives him of his much sought after freedom and happiness in life. Even his identity seems to be threatened by love. Prior to falling in love with Thea, Augie, though is tempted into the 'designs' of other people but that is for a certain period only and he takes himself away from them when his individuality begins to be threatened. However, it is not so in love. Love, for Augie, is involuntary and as he himself says, he does not even have the opportunity to decide to say 'yes' or 'no' in love. He falls into it immediately, almost dizzily, losing all control over himself. It happens so in case of Thea. No sooner does he begin to love her that everything else becomes irrelevant:

"For while I was not with her, where I was intended to be, it didn't make much difference where I was. All intervening things and interferences were of the same unreal kind and belonged out there ... The reality was now, and in here; ... "

Augie is never before so obsessed with a single human being and he follows her wherever she goes. Though he realises that in his abstract love for Thea, he is losing his liberty and moving towards the 'huge drag' that threatened to wear him away, yet it can not be helped. He feels his fate so closely tied to Thea that what happens to...

1. Ibid., p.364
her has to happen to him also. This total dependence in love makes him move with her to Mexico as an accomplice in her strange scheme of 'eagle-training' though everybody warns him against it. She had the initiative", admits Augie, "and carried me; If I had a different independent idea I might have tried to take the lead instead. But I had none."¹ Once there in Mexico, though in the early stages, he is thankful even to be her 'supernumery or assistant' but soon the differences begin to arise as Thea gets more and more absorbed first with her eagle 'caligula' and later with her 'iguanas, snakes and what not'. Augie, the lover, is slowly reduced to a mere helper in her strange preoccupations while Thea engages herself in other things of her interest. In one of the hunting accident, even his skull gets fractured by a horse but there is no stopping Thea from her craze of catching wild pigs and snakes. Soon Augie - as a remedy to his illnesses, takes to gambling in the company of Moulton, Iggy and others of 'the international colony'. This causes further deterioration in their relations and Augie's 'favour' to Stella - a chance acquaintance in Mexico, finally, leads to their separation. Thea, immediately after this incident, decides to go to Chilpanzingo all alone, totally 'rejecting' Augie as a lover.

¹. Ibid., p.380
It is in this hour of crisis after Thea has left him that Augie tries to analyse and 'investigate' his self in relation to freedom and love:

"Now I had started, and this terrible investigation had to go on. If this was how I was, it was certainly not how I appeared but must be my secret. So if I wanted to please, it was in order to mislead or show everyone, wasn't it, now? And this must be because I had an idea everyone was my better and had some thing I didn't have. But what did people seem to me anyhow, something fantastic? I didn't want to be what they made of me but wanted to please them. Kindly explain! An independent fate and love too - What confusion!" (emphasis added)

All through the novel, Bellow maintains this conflict between love and independent fate. As a pursuer of the self, Augie is never comfortable in love. Thea had earlier warned him that love would always prove 'strange and foreign' to him and now he comes to recognise the truth that love did, indeed, appear 'strange' to him 'no matter what form it took' and even if there were no eagles and snakes. Love for Augie has always been a submission, a passive acceptance of an external scheme or 'design' and hence it proves a hinderance in his unique objectives. He wants to be a sincere follower of love, at the same time he longs for the liberation of his self. This dilemma remains unresolved till the end. Inspite of his repeated failures in life, he persists in his quest for real love and freedom although on all the occasions that he falls in love with,

1. Ibid., p.464
be it Esther, Thea, Stella or others, he has to eat a humble pie. What is most adversely affected in the process is his freedom to be his own master and goal-setter and live life accordingly. Augie's real fault as he comes to acknowledge in his intense soul searching examination is his 'stubbornness' to maintain his 'purest feelings' in love in the midst of all scheming and selfishness in the world. He suffers intensely because he loves in a vacuum and is not able to reconcile his love with the realities of human condition. His idea of love, despite all his nobility and sincerity lacks sufficient clarity and relationship with the concrete realities of the world and hence proves to be 'disappointing' and 'self-damaging'.

His 'conclusive' love with Stella - a sequel to his earlier love with Thea, does not, in any way, improve upon his condition. Though initially in her romance with Stella he feels (as on earlier occasions) that he has come to the end of his trouble but things are not as simple as he had earlier imagined them to be. Stella, instead of being 'simply warm and loving' turns out to be an ambitious girl, one who lied 'more than average' about her life and affairs before marriage. Married to her, Augie is deprived of both - the real love and warmth he had expected from her as well as the freedom to seek his true being. In Europe, while Stella happily works in a film company, Augie has involved himself in illicit dealing of buying and selling the surplus goods of war.
What accounts for Augie's failure in his ambitions and his love is his inability to see the contradictions between his ideals and reality. He longs for 'simplicity' in a world which is too complex; a world where wealth and position reign supreme, whereas Augie influenced by his humble origins believes in the ultimate goodness of human motives. Since his childhood days, he had cherished the ideal of being a teacher and educate children. He wanted to get married and set up a kind of foster home for children. But his 'kingly' mission peters down in the end to his tame dependence on Stella and Mintouchian. Augie, till the last, is not able to comprehend the relationship between the individual and the world at large. Due to his failure to make a clear estimate of his condition, Augie's aims and ideals, though they are noble and high, lose their relevance since they exist in his mind only and are not concretely related to social realities. Clem Tambow tries to make him recognize his fault when he says: "You have ambitions. But you're ambitious in general. You're not concrete enough. You have to be concrete." He further accuses Augie of being in the grip of a 'nobility syndrome' which makes him ignore the reality of life: "What I guess about you is that you have a nobility syndrome. You can't adjust to the reality situation. I can see it all over you. You want there should be Man, with capital M, with great stature."

1. Ibid., 501.
2. Ibid., p.502
This failure to comprehend and adjust to the 'reality situation' makes Augie land up in utter confusion when he is neither able to gain real love nor succeeds in defining his real self. Yet inspite of his repeated disappointments, Augie does not lose faith in life and is unrelenting in his attempts to move towards his goal. He refuses to agree to Mimi's fatalistic view of life that change is impossible; neither does he agree with Einhorn's idea of isolation and uselessness of effort. His persistent refusal to lead 'a disappointed life' and his constant 'striving' against reality to create something meaningful in life bring him near to a Camusian rebel protagonist who does not give up his struggle till the last moment. Augie's unceasing strife for a better fate relates to his natural self as defined by the 'axial lines' of life. At the most critical juncture of his life when he is in deep melancholy at Thea's rejection of him as a lover, he feels he has discovered something essential which would help him bear with his sufferings and put a stop to his striving for real self:

...Something has happened to me today ... I have a feeling about the axial lines of life with respect to which you must be straight or else your existence is merely clownery, hiding tragedy. I must have had a feeling since I was a kid about these axial lines which made me want to have my existence on them, and so I have said "no" like a stubborn fellow to all my persuaders, just on the obstinacy of my memory of these lines, never entirely clear. But lately I have felt these thrilling lines again. When striving stops, there they are as a gift. I was lying on the couch here before and they suddenly went quivering right straight through me. Truth, love, peace, bounty, usefulness, harmony!

1. Ibid., p.524
The discovery of the 'axial lines' gives the human being a sense of completion and harmony so that with the peaceful coexistence of truth and love, he can live a life of 'true joy' and happiness. Augie believes that: "...any man at any time can come back to these axial lines, ... At any time life can come together again and man be regenerated ... He will be brought into focus. He will live with true joy. Even helplessness will not take away his power, even wandering will not take him away from himself ...

Augie would like to live his life in tune with the 'axial lines', so he is in search of something 'lasting and durable' in order to get near to them. But Augie's vision of foster home does not appear to materialise even dimly so he would like to start in a much 'simpler' and 'lower down' way. But to get to the 'axial lines', Augie's adventures and striving will have to come to an end so that he is able to achieve the truth of love and harmony. And that for Augie is not possible. 'To sit still' does not seem to be in keeping with his character; his striving never stops. In the end we find Augie to be still a 'wanderer' travelling all over Europe in connection with his illegal business for Mintouchian. Right from the beginning, Augie has never had 'any place of rest'. He has always been on the move. Hence the ending seems quite appropriate in the sense of being in consonance with his nature. Augie, in the end seems no where near to his "most basic passion" of

1. Ibid., p.524-25
finding the "axial lines" of life, yet he stubbornly insists on being a person of hope.

Augie's loud 'enigmatic' laugh on his way to Brudges, in the midst of destructiveness of nature and perhaps of life too, is a clear gesture of affirmation of life; in an attempt to justify his optimism, Augie concludes:

"I may well be a flop at this line of endeavour. Columbus too thought he was a flop, probably, when they sent him back in chains. Which didn't prove there was no America."

Augie's frank admission of the continuation of his inner struggle to achieve his much cherished ideal by being a 'Columbus' in his own way not only depicts a gain in his consciousness but also affirms him as a rebel hero in the Camusian sense. As far as Camus' rebellion is concerned, Augie's endless struggle is profoundly positive in the sense that it reveals that part of man which must always be defended - that is - his inner self. Augie, time and again, resists committing himself to the various 'offers' and 'schemes' of the world in order to protect his own true being. Though unsuccessful in finding a distinctive fate, he has gained the momentary vision that "When striving stops, there they (axial lines) are as a gift" - a vision which for a Camusian rebel, offers a promise of reconciliation, not with society but with life itself. And it is out of this reconciliation with life that truth, love, peace and harmony would emerge.
Henderson the Rain King

Henderson the Rain King (1959) is in a way a continuation of the same intense striving of the protagonist for a meaningful life and a desperate quest for the self with which Augie March was involved. Eugene Henderson, Bellow's only gentile protagonist and a multimillionaire descendent of an aristocratic family, is endowed with immense wealth and energy, yet suffers from a continuous sense of dissatisfaction and spiritual malaise in an environment of plenty. A life of opulence and prosperity can provide man with the physical comforts but not the bliss of life of inner peace and harmony in the absence of which all values turn banal and man-made bungling. Suffering from a sense of frustration and surfeit, Eugene Henderson "the absurd seeker of high qualities" runs away from the arena of life to find peace and harmony in the primitive jungles of imaginary Africa. However, there in Africa, after a series of experiences, Henderson comes to 'learn' that it is not possible to achieve internal peace and order without submitting to a measure of order in the external world.

Henderson, with his huge height and extraordinary weight of two hundred and thirty pounds, is almost a crazy man, 'moody, rough, tyrannical and probably mad'. He is wealthy, well educated - a graduate from Ivy League University, yet due to lack of meaning and direction in
life, lives in a state of terrible discontent and despair. His spiritual frustration finds its outlet in his rash, violent and illogical behaviour with the family members and outsiders alike. An 'egotistical monster' at home, he gives his second wife Lily a terrible time, shouting and swearing at her in public and private. Away from home too, he is heavily drunk and abusive—'hitting everyone who crossed his path—man or beast', and always behaving like 'an ignorant man and a bum' although he is neither. He tries to get rid of this aggressive temperament by inflicting his anger on inanimate things, as suggested to him by a student of psychology but it doesn't help much: "Rude begets rude", Henderson says disappointingly, "and blows, blows; at least in my case; it not only begot but it increased. Wrath increased with wrath." Consequently, he is a source of continual harassment to his family, friends, acquaintances, tenants and all others he comes into contact with. As a matter of fact, Henderson's main problem is his lack of comprehension to relate himself to other people and to society at large. Like earlier Bellovian protagonists, Henderson too is torn between society and self. He can be quite comfortable while he is all alone but not in society: "Society is what beats me", claims Henderson. "Alone I can be pretty good, but let me go among people and there's the devil to pay."  

2. Ibid., p.49.
it like a child. With all his advantages of noble race and worldly pleasures, he feels like a stranger in his native land. Unable to fulfil his cherished ambition of becoming a doctor, he is a 'displaced' man who yearns for a 'station' in life. The capitalist society of America can sustain him materially but it can not cater to the poverty of the soul. The inner voice within his heart constantly cries for clarity and truth in the midst of chaos and meaninglessness of life. The manifestation of Henderson's need in the form of "I want, I want, I want", always stirs him and never leaves him alone: "It happened every afternoon, and when I tried to suppress it, it got even stronger." But Henderson has no clear and specific idea of his need in the beginning. It is only later in the jungles of Arnewi and Wariri that he comes to learn of the real object of his yearning.

With difficulties in maintaining his essential manhood, life in America becomes increasingly useless to Henderson. His sense of alienation and displacement makes him feel himself inferior and worthless even to the pigs - in the wake of his life turning into a 'mere trophy':

"Taxwise, even the pigs were profitable," he exclaims with horror, "I couldn't lose money. But they were killed and they were eaten. They made ham and gloves and gelatin and fertilizer. What did I make? Why, I made a sort of trophy, I suppose. A man like me may become something like a trophy."1

1. Ibid., p.24
Henderson is painfully aware of his pitiable situation and makes deliberate efforts to come out of it; he learns to play his father's violin in an attempt to cure himself of his frustrations by making spiritual contact with his father's spirit: "I played with dedication, with feeling, with longing, love-played to the point of emotional collapse." 1

But like other things, music too fails to provide him any remedy to his metaphysical problems and he feels continuously strangulated in his heart. Things get worse and worse and pretty soon they become quite complicated:

When I think of my condition at the age of fifty five when I bought the ticket, all is grief. The facts begin to crowd me and soon I get a pressure in the chest. A disorderly rush begins - my parents, my wives, my girls, my children, my farm, my animals, my habits, my money, my music lessons, my drunkenness, my prejudices, my brutality, my teeth, my face, my soul! I have to cry, "No, no, get back, curse you, let me above!" But how can they let me alone? They belong to me. They are mine. And they pile into me from all sides. It turns into chaos. 2

Even after getting married twice, Henderson is not able to lead a happily settled life and suffers from a terrible sense of loneliness. His unceasing longing for 'something' more - something qualitatively different from all his physical comforts - brings his life virtually on the verge of collapse. His life being devoid of any

1. Ibid., p.30
2. Ibid., p.3
purpose or direction even at the age of fifty five, Henderson is afraid of death approaching him and 'giving him notice'. He had experienced death closely at the end of a wild tour of Europe with Lily after spending several painful months in Paris in an efforts to adjust to his disintegrating marriage with his first wife, Frances. After leaving Lily, he drives to Banyules where they keep a marine station and undergoes a strange experience of death symbolic of the cosmic coldness while looking at an Octopus in the aquarium there:

I looked in at an Octopus and the creature seemed also to look at me .... The eyes spoke to me coldly. But even more speaking even more cold, was the soft head with its speckles ... a cosmic coldness in which I felt I was dying. The tentacles throbbed and motioned through the glass, the bubbles, sped upward, and I thought, 'This is my last day. Death is giving me notice.'

Rejecting this vision of death Henderson begins to live life all the more intensely and fiercely but unfortunately everything that he does results in failure and destruction. During his violent fighting with Lily one winter morning, Henderson is once again reminded of his death and annihilation when his anger makes the old housekeeper Miss Lenox die of heart attack. While inspecting her rooms, the accumulated junk of the ages there brings back to Henderson the thought of his own annihilation:

1. Ibid., p.19
And I thought, "Oh, shame, shame! Oh, crying shame! How can we? Why do we allow ourselves? What are we doing? The last little room of dirt is waiting. Without windows. So for God's sake make a move, Henderson, put forth effort. You, too, will die of this pestilence. Death will annihilate you and nothing will remain, and there will be nothing left but junk."

It is this confrontation with death which finally drives him to Africa for the sake of the illumination of his own self as well as of others. King of Wariri clearly states this fear of death as the real reason for Henderson's voyage to Africa: "You fled what you were. You did not believe you had to perish. Once more and a last time, you tried the world. With a hope of alteration." 

Like other Bellovian heroes, Henderson, too, is caught in the familiar conflict between intentions and reality. He yearns for a change in life for order and meaning whereas all around him, he is confronted with chaos, sufferings and the terror of loneliness. He feels trapped by man's mortality and his inability to comprehend reality. Consequently everything appears strange and mysterious to him: "We are funny creatures" exclaims Henderson with wonder. "We don't see the stars as they are, so why do we love them? They are not small gold objects but endless fire. Strange? Why shouldn't it be strange? It is strange. it is all strange."  

1. Ibid., p.40  
2. Ibid., p.260  
3. Ibid., p.285-86
Man's inability to grasp reality to his gradual alienation from this world, from other people and from his own self. Consequently he feels dislocated and frustrated, without any place for him in life. Though in his arguments to Lily, Henderson claims to be on 'damned good terms' with reality but later realises that it is not sufficient to fulfil his spiritual needs. Hence he decides to go to Africa with one of his friends - Charlie Albert, in the hope of discovering some 'remedy' for his chaotic state of mind and on a kind of 'quest' for 'essentials' which can help him to achieve order, stability and a secure, meaningful place in life. It is in the primitive and isolated villages of Africa that Henderson hopes to reconsider the vision of reality and truth in new perspectives.

No sooner does he begin to enter the heart of Africa - "the ancient bed of mankind", that the presence of 'beautiful life' there brings in him a feeling of a kind of purification and relief. He no longer feels the pressure in his chest and the voice inside him is also stilled for the time being:

It was all simplified and splendid, and I felt I was entering the past - the real past, no history or junk like that. The prehuman past. And I believed that there was something between the stones and me. The mountains were naked, and often snake like in their forms, without tree, and you could see the clouds being born on the slopes.

1. Ibid., p.46
Finally Henderson along with Romilayu - his guide, reaches Arnewi which is like the 'original place' where man was born. From here on begins the first stage of Henderson's education which would continue in a more intense manner in his stay with the next tribe the Wariris. The Arnewi are basically gentle, kind, peace loving and cattle-worshipping people, especially the cows and have developed a whole language of cow behaviour. Disclosing his purpose, Henderson tells them that he is 'really kind of on a quest' there. According to the custom in Arnewi, a new arrival always has to wrestle with their champion fighter to make acquaintance with them. Henderson's consequent fight with Prince Itelo proves decisive in the sense that it leads to the breaking of his spirit's sleep and consequent confrontation with the truth. Henderson defines this time as the 'hour which burst my spirits sleep'. Earlier too, Henderson had experienced a similar confrontation with truth when, while chopping wood for the fire, a piece of log had hit him hard in the nose; that metaphoric blow of life had made him ponder that 'truth comes with blows'. Henderson, in his successive adventures with Arnewis is further to learn about this 'truth' in all its grimness of realities. Yet this 'bursting' of his spirit's sleep is the beginning of his consciousness and identity in the same way as the absurd man suddenly breaks his deadly routine of life so as to arise and come to terms with the naked realities of life.
Among the Arnewi, Henderson meets the old Queen Willatale - the 'Woman O' Bittahness' who is the very incarnation of stability and perfection. Touching her breast in a customary form of greeting Henderson feels as if he is touching the 'secrets of life'. Almost immediately, Henderson is convinced that it is the queen who can help him in solving the problems and mysteries of his life:

I believed the queen could straighten me out if she wanted to; as if, any minute now, she might open her hand and show me the thing, the source, the germ - the cipher. The mystery you know. I was absolutely convinced she must have it... It comforted me just to see her, and I thought I might learn to be sustained too if I followed her example. And altogether I felt my hour of liberation was drawing near when the sleep of the spirit was liable to burst.

Confronted by the queen's desire to know about him and his whereabouts, Henderson is compelled to painfully review his life and his conditions before telling her who he is:

Who - who was I? A millionaire wanderer and wayfarer. A brutal and violent man driven into the world. A man who fled his own country, settled by his forefather's. A fellow whose heart said, I want, I want. Who played the violin in despair, seeking the voice of angels. Who had to burst the spirit's sleep, or else. So what could I tell this old queen in a lion skin and raincoat...?

Finally, Henderson confesses to the queen about his inner voice and as he had expected, she helps him break his

1. Ibid., p.70
2. Ibid., p.76-77
spirit's sleep by recognising that voice as 'grun-tu-molani - man's desire to live - not the desire for immortality but the acceptance of the facts of life with all its limitations and disappointments. She is able to make out that Henderson finds this world as quite a strange place because of its horrifying reality of death. Excited beyond measure at the recognition and understanding of his deepest desire, Henderson salutes and blesses them all:

Not only I molani for myself but for everybody. I could not bear how sad things have become in the world and so I set out because of this molani. Grun-tu-molani, old lady - old queen. Grun-tumolani, everybody!" "Grun-tu-molani. God does not shoot dice with our souls, and therefore grun-tu-molani."

Henderson's education with the Arnewi queen, however remains inadequate and far from complete, for though queen Willatale is considered to be perfect, there is a defect in her animal power. Her essence being quietude and inaction, she accepts everything passively and unconditionally. Consequently her teachings serve only a limited purpose. This accounts for Henderson's rashness and impulsiveness in ridding their 'cursed' village cistern of the frogs. All Henderson's modern techniques and his war time training end in miserable failure with his home-made bomb blowing up the cistern as well as the frogs. Once again Henderson is exposed before the people. He feels deeply humiliated and grieved and even offers himself  

1. Ibid., p.85
to be killed by Prince Itelo. Henderson is at a loss to understand the reasons for his constant failures in life and particularly so before the crowd: "Why for once, just once! couldn't I get my heart's desire? I have to be doomed always to bungle." And thus unable to bear the disgrace and humiliation at his failure, Henderson leaves the place along with Ramilayu, having demolished both their water and his own hopes for indepth 'learning' about life and its realities.

Henderson's second stage of education and awareness in Wariri proves much harder than the earlier one in Arnewi, for the Wariri are less gentle and more aggressive 'lion loving' tribe of 'darker truths'. Romilayu rightly calls them 'the children of darkness'. After severe examinations and cross-questioning by Bunam and others and having spent the first night in a cell with a corpse, Henderson is at last introduced to their king Dahfu, who inspite of his utter calmness seems to possess unusual intensity of life. There is something about the king that immediately convinces Henderson that they could approach ultimates together; although in comparison to the king, Henderson appears to be weak and helpless: "He (the king) seemed all ease", admits Henderson. "And I all limitation. He was extended, floating; I was contracted and cramped. The undersides of my knees were sweating. Yes, he was

1. Ibid., p.111
soaring like a spirit while I sank like a stone..."1

King Dahfu, like the queen Willatale of Arnewi is a 'Be-er' and Henderson who still is in the process of 'Becoming' hopes to learn the secret of 'Being' from him. Henderson feels that the process of 'becoming' has exhausted him to such an extent that his inner spirit has gone to sleep and it is time now to wake it up: "Enough! Enough! Time to have Become, Time to Be! Burst the Spirit's sleep. Wake up, America! Stump the experts."2 He soon gets a chance to 'wake up' to the yearnings of his soul when the king invites him to participate in the rain-making ceremony, for Wariri too, like Arnewi are faced with a drought. The 'service motivation' in Henderson - 'a great desire to do a disinterested and pure thing' for the people, urges him to offer himself to lift the giant wooden goddess Mummah when all other contestants, including the last year champion, Bunam, have failed to do so. The task, which is necessary to bring rain, offers Henderson a unique opportunity to demonstrate his strength which till now had been greatly misutilised by him. His successful attempt to lift the goddess whom he treats as a 'living personality' makes him ecstatic with joy:

I stood still. There beside Mummah in her new situation I myself was filled with happiness. I was so gladdened by what I had done that my whole body was filled with soft heat, with soft and

1. Ibid., p. 160
2. Idem.
sacred light. The sensations of illness I had experienced since morning were all converted into their opposites ... And so my fever was transformed into jubilation. My spirit was awake and it welcomed life anew. Damn the whole thing! life anew! I was still alive and kicking and I had the old Grun-tu-molani.¹

The experience provides Henderson, an opportunity to get into the 'real depth', within his self. Henderson had considered this occasion as his 'main chance' to put an end to 'becoming' and get himself transformed into 'being' instead, for which he had been waiting for a long time. By successfully lifting the goddess, Henderson has now become their 'rain king' - their 'Sungo' as they call it. His jubilation however is short lived, for quite soon he is stripped naked by the old amazons and made to undertake a farcical tour of the village followed by the wild, howling mob. Finally he is thrown into a big cattle pond. And ironically enough all this was done in greatest earnestness: "I came, dripping stale mud, out of the pond. I hoped at least this would cover my shame, for the flimsy grasses (all that he was covered with now) flying, had left everything open".²

The whole process of Henderson's becoming the rain king, his falling into the mud and resultant feelings of pain and humiliation might well be taken as his final immersion into the facts of his own existence and he is not very happy about it. But the whole thing had been 'irresistible':

1. Ibid., p.192-93
2. Ibid., p.199
... One of those drives". Henderson laments, "which there was no question of fighting. And what had I got myself into? What were the consequences! On the ground floor of the palace, filthy, naked and bruised I lay in a little room... my upper lip grew long and my nose was distorted; it was aching with the whiplashes and I felt my eyes had grown black and huge." Oh, I'm in a bad way..."¹

King Dahfu, nevertheless, is deeply impressed by Henderson's monumental strength and 'fierceness' and consequently has 'far other ideas' for him. In fact Dahfu—a powerful combination of Western learning and tribal wisdom—represents everything that Henderson is not and would like to be—calm, relaxed and without any anxious cares inspite of many complications and unfulfilled tasks that lie before him. The way to achieve a balanced inner spirit, accordingly to Dahfu, is to travel back into the wild chaotic forces within our primitive selves and its only after temporarily 'becoming' the animal within that a man gains philosophical insight into the meaning of living. Consequently he regards the mere desire to live as 'insufficient' and would like Henderson to do something 'more' if the latter is to satisfy his inner voice and achieve wisdom and peace in life:

 Granted, grun-tu-molani is much" says the king, "but it is not alone sufficient. Mr. Henderson, more is required. I can show you something now something without which you will never understand thoroughly my special aim nor my point of view."²

1. Ibid., p.203.
2. Ibid., p.218.
Subsequently, he takes Henderson into the lion’s den for it is here in the company of lioness ‘Atti’ that Henderson will learn to overcome his old ‘egoistic’ self and be a changed man, more at peace with himself and with other human beings. Henderson is thrilled to see the strangeness of the animal world in the form of Atti’s antics. Once again he is reminded of Daniel’s prophecy which augured his dwelling with the beasts of the field implying thereby that he was not entirely fit for human companionship. However Henderson is quite afraid to enter this world of the beasts. We find that while inside the den, Dahfu feels quite at home with Atti and playfully rides her back, Henderson is terrified at the thought of facing her. Yet despite his fears and doubts, Henderson continues with his daily ‘lion lessons’ in search for true being and nobility. Moreover by now he had realised that unless he understood everything about lions, no real friendship was possible between him and the king for whom he had developed deep admiration by now. Dahfu gradually persuades Henderson to literally act like a lion so as to absorb all her attributes within him. For Atti, being ‘unavoidable’, could ‘teach’ him many crucial things about life and might ‘change’ him into a more conscious and more ‘open’ an individual - one who could adjust himself to the varying situations of life instead of running away from them:

First she is unavoidable” tells Dahfu of Atti. And this is what you need, as you are an avoider Oh, you have accomplished momentous avoidances. But
she will change that. She will make consciousness to shine. She will burnish you. She will force the present moment upon you.\textsuperscript{1}

Henderson at first is quite reluctant to act like her and 'copy' her because he is extremely 'self recoiled' and it is this tendency, says the king, which is responsible for his egoistic tendencies. But if he becomes more open and more patient, he would be a transformed individual, with his fear yielding to beauty and the unnecessary 'egoemphasis' removed. This is what he has to learn, from Atti — to accept precisely the 'given' conditions and wanting no more than that: "Observe that Atti is all lion. Does not take issue with the inherent. Is one hundred percent within the given."\textsuperscript{2}

Henderson now, having been brought down by the king to 'the bottom of things' finally becomes the lion and mentally conceives the environment by going down on all fours and roaring like her. He roars from the bottom of his soul so that all his sorrows and unfulfilled aspirations come out in the process and what more, he even lets forth 'the last thing of all' that lay hidden inside him and that is his 'human longing'. He would now roar up daily and the whole exercise is like 'convalescing' from some 'wasting disease'. He is beginning to feel himself a different man 'strongly sensitive' and 'sentimental' to the beauty around him. His most supreme moment of roaring is

\begin{itemize}
\item[1.] Ibid., p.260
\item[2.] Ibid., p.263
\end{itemize}
in fact a cry which summarizes the entire course of his life on this earth: "From birth to Africa; and certain words crept into my roars, like "God", "Help", "Lord have mercy" only they came out "Hoolp!" "Mooooorcy!"."

We find that Henderson's tutelage with the king has made him believe in an 'undefined force' which rules the world and to which man can turn to in his hour of need. He appeals to God for Dahfu's and his own safety at the time of the capturing of Gmilo - the wild lion in the jungle believed to contain the soul of Dahfu's father. And in his own words, "It wasn't the first time in recent years by any means that I had addressed some words to God." Though Henderson is not able to understand the exact nature of this 'Supernatural power' he prays to the Heavenly Father to 'take off his stupid sins' and preserve him from unreal things: "Oh, Thou who tookest me from pigs, let me not be killed over lions. And forgive my crimes and nonsense and let me return to Lily and the Kids."2

However, as earlier in Arnewi, here in Wariri too, though Henderson is able to learn much through Dahfu and Atti yet his education remains 'defective' in certain aspects. For one reason, both Dahfu and Atti are thoroughly satisfied with their lot and their 'stillness'.

1. Ibid., p.274
2. Ibid., p.253
inspite of the numerous difficulties posed by the people around them and not caring the least about the conspiracy being hatched against their lives. Dahfu, inspite of the fact that he is not yet a complete king until he captures Gmilo, lies among his many naked wives 'sumptuously at rest'. His neglect and total indifference to Henderson's warning to him against the conspiracy of the priests ultimately leads to his death by Gmilo.

However not withstanding his limitations, the crucial thing that Dahfu helps Henderson realise, before being finally killed, is the meaning and significance of death and suffering in life. It is Henderson's fear of death that had earlier led to his flight to Africa but in the company of Dahfu, he has learned to face death by not only entering the lion's den but literally becoming the lion himself. Though till last, he is not able to shed away his fears about death yet when the need does arise, Henderson does face it without any evasions and with the hope of change in himself for the better:

"Yes, I thought, I believed I could change; I was willing to overcome my old self; yes to do that a man had to adopt some new standard ... I would never make a lion. I knew that; but I might pick up a small gain here and there in the attempt."

Dahfu indeed, is practically living the lesson that Henderson is trying to learn from him. The king is fearlessly living his life in the midst of death threats. The danger of death looming large over his head does not
seem to perplex him a bit. Henderson is deeply impressed by the king's lion like courage in facing the realities around him. Mankind, Dahfu believes, has wrapped itself in uselessly repeating the cycle of 'fear and desire without a change' whereas what is needed is the effort to break this cycle. Henderson who is yet to achieve the courage to break this cycle of fear at last does it through his final encounter with death in the form of lioness Gmilo. While he accompanies Dahfu to the jungle in a last bid to capture Gmilo, Henderson is finally confronted with the wild and terrifying form of reality. Unlike Atti who was a 'tamed' reality, Gmilo is an uncontrolled monstrous beast whose 'snarling' is indeed the 'voice of death'. Henderson now realises that his frantic search and love for reality of which he had so proudly boasted to Lily, had only been a 'pretence', and that it was in fact 'unreality' that has been his scheme for a 'troubled but eternal life'. This confrontation with the wild lion's roar once again pierces his dormancy and awakens him to a higher consciousness where there is no escape from reality. Henderson who earlier in his life had been 'monstrously proud' of his suffering, now with the death of the king by Gmilo comes to realise that it has "no spice at all" and that "it was only terrible". What Bellow seems to be saying here is that mere recognition and passive acceptance of the 'given' conditions is not enough and that man has continuously to act and struggle against these conditions so as to give meaning to his life. Unlike Willatale, Dahfu and Atti who have reached the stage of 'Be=None' or to use Sartre's term
'being-in-itself' and have no cares and worries to bother them, everything about Henderson cries for salvation: "salvation, salvation! what shall I do? What must I do? At once! what will become of me?"

Henderson being exhausted with the dissatisfactory conditions of life, had sought to achieve 'stillness' and 'equanimity' by becoming a 'Be-er' like Willatale and Dahfu but he realises that for the human being, the state of dormancy is not possible. His 'striving' stops only with death and before that he is always in the state of 'becoming' - learning new things and exploring fresh possibilities in life. Though Henderson admits that struggles of desire can never be won and that our longings and 'willings' end in dust only yet one can not afford to give up one's endeavours in the same way as one can not get away from regularity and rhythm of life. Henderson, after the king's death becomes aware of the danger to his own life too by the scheming priests and successfully plans his escape from Wariri. However before leaving the place, he also carries with him the lion cub that is supposed to contain Dahfu's soul, perhaps as a token of his love for Dahfu and his 'debt' to 'animality' which ultimately made him confront reality in its most fierce form.

Henderson's restless inner voice that had repeatedly demanded reality is at last stilled in Africa.

1. Ibid., p.217.
He tells Romilayu that many of the Americans had gone forth on a similar journey "to redeem the present and discover the future." And Henderson being a 'high spirited kind of guy' couldn't refrain from going out into the world in search of 'wisdom of life'. The essence of the wisdom that Henderson comes to acquire through his imaginary journey is his 'sense of life' - his 'natural self' gained from his varied experiences in Africa. He comes to realise that though life in this world might apparently appear to be useless and imprisoning yet he must live and find solution to his problems here only and any kind of escape into any other world would only amount to a cowardly act of running away from the complexities of life. This realisation makes him think anew about life and instead of wasting his energies in useless fightings as he did earlier, he plans to do something different and something useful now. In his letter to Lily before his return to America, he writes:

I am giving up the violin. I guess I will never reach my object through it," to raise my spirit from the earth, to leave the body of this death. I was very stubborn. I wanted to raise myself into another world. My life and deeds were a prison. Well, Lily, everything is going to be different from now on.1

Once back in America, Henderson is determined to study medicine and become a doctor. His decision may seem ridiculous at this stage in his life, nevertheless, it is by serving humanity in the role of a 'healer' that

1. Ibid., p.204
Henderson finally wishes to reform him. Having entered a new world of the self through his ventures in Africa, he feels the need to ponder over the most crucial question faced by Bellovian heroes - the question concerned with the most suitable way to live life: "I must begin to think how to live. I must break Lily from blackmail and set love on a true course."¹

His gesture of warmth and love towards the orphan boy in the plane on his back journey to America and his fond recollection of his close friendship with 'Smolak' (the old brown bear with whom he had worked while in the amusement park in Ontario) reflect his changed attitude towards life. Now he can frankly assert that "Whatever gains I ever made were always due to love and nothing else."²

When the plane lands briefly in Newfoundland for fuelling, Henderson, in a spirit of exultation, takes the boy on his back and runs playfully around the plane. The orphan boy, the fresh air and the lion cub plus the happiness he expects at idle Wild from meeting Lily - all are like a 'medicine' applied to him and have an exhilarating effect on his soul. His heart overflows with joy:

1. Ibid., p.288
2. Ibid., p.339.
"Laps and laps I galloped around the shining and riveted body of the plane ... The great beautiful propellers were still, all four of them. I guess I felt it was my turn now to move, and so went running - leaping, leaping, pounding, and tingling over the pure white lining of the gray Arctic Silence."

This powerful image of love, friendship and affirmation of the self at the end suggests that Henderson at last has found his new land - a new way of life. His understanding and acceptance of reality and death certainly makes him a better man with newer possibilities of self-fulfilment as well as his positive contribution to the fulfilment of others. His quest apparently seems to be a successful one since he has gained the 'sense of being' and the 'wisdom of life' in the form of his love and solidarity for other human beings.